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Information Leak Puzzling Congress

WASHINGTON

The leak to the press of a highly classified report from the Senate Intelligence Committee has thrown an apple of discord among those charged with guarding the national security.

The leak raises fresh doubts about the reliability of Congress in keeping sensitive material, now furnished by the CIA on a regular basis, from being used for publicity leverage in policy disputes. This leak unfairly assailed Henry Kissinger and former CIA Director William Colby, and reflected a callous lack of concern for the damage done to private reputations.

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The episode opened with the delivery on May 17 to the National Security Council and the CIA of one copy each of a top secret report. It was an analysis by the Senate Intelligence Committee of the extent to which the responsible committees of Congress were kept informed concerning the secret U.S. intervention in the Angolan civil war in 1975.

Reacting to the allegations of a retired CIA agent, John Stockwell, that Kissinger and Colby had withheld information from the Congress on the CIA role in Angola, the committee undertook in its report to establish the facts.

However, the findings in this report persuaded CIA Director Stansfield Turner to make an urgent request to the NSC staff that it not be sent to the president until additional evidence had been reviewed by the Senate committee.

Turner claimed that the drafters of the report showed bias and inadequate knowledge in reaching the conclusion that Kissinger and Colby had misled Congress in their testimony and that the CIA had exceeded its authority.

The NSC staff recommended that the report be remanded back to the Senate committee and CIA to see if they could not reach agreement on the basis of all available information, including CIA operational cable traffic that was to be released to give the Senate committee a clearer picture.

The chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, Sen. Birch Bayh, D-Ind., now states that after an exhaustive review a final version of the report is nearly completed.

Bayh is satisfied that neither Kissinger nor Colby tried to mislead Congress. He

Meanwhile, Seymour Hersh of the *York Times* called Senator Bayh's in early July and read a description of report which he had received from an identified source. He appears to have a garbled version of the first draft concerning allegations against Kissinger and by.

Hersh was told that his story contained many inaccuracies. He was urged not to rush into print, since the final report would be issued shortly.

On July 16, the *Times* published on the front page Hersh's story stating that the Senate Committee had concluded that Kissinger and Colby had misled Congress "according to sources with first-hand knowledge."

There was no mention of Hersh being told by Bayh's office that his story was inaccurate in many respects.

Serious damage has been done to individual reputations, and the CIA has again been cast in the role of a "rogue elephant." But the search is on in earnest for the leaker since, if this kind of information can leak, there is no guarantee that vital secrets will not be surfaced for partisan purposes.

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The NSC staffers are convinced that the source of the leak lies in the Senate Intelligence Committee staff, which is deeply split into liberal and conservative factions. One NSC staffer has offered to take a lie detector test if a particular Senate staffer will do the same.

The speculation is that someone on the Senate staff strongly opposed to the Angola intervention realized the final report would not contain the sensational allegations and decided to go public with the earlier version in order to make his point.

Sen. Bayh points out that the leak could have come from the NSC or the CIA, but he has ordered a full investigation of his own staff and tightened security controls. Just a week before this leak, President Carter sharply warned key members of Congress that he could no longer release sensitive information to the committees if the damaging leaks continued.

Up to this episode, the Senate Intelligence Committee has had a reasonably good reputation for security. Sen. Bayh and his colleagues know they must try to find the leaker, if they are to insure continuing access to the information essential to their oversight function.